

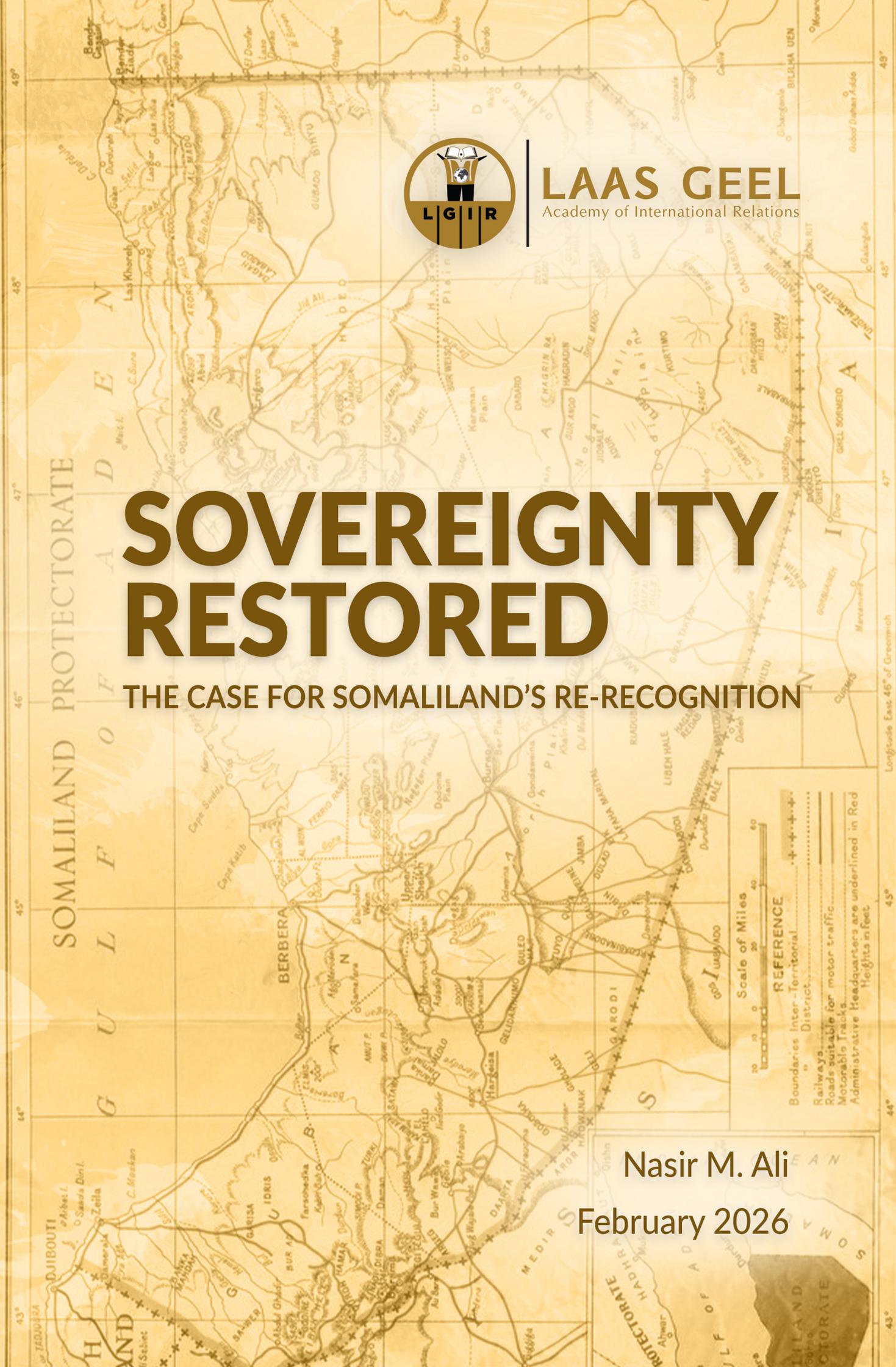


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THE CASE FOR SOMALILAND'S RE-RECOGNITION

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Cover Photo: This map displays the British Somaliland Protectorate during the colonial era. It outlines the protectorate's boundaries with adjacent territories, including French Somaliland, the Aden Protectorate, Italian Somalia, and Abyssinia (present-day Ethiopia), and with geographical features such as the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. These colonial-era borders are significant as they form the basis for the modern-day Republic of Somaliland's claimed boundaries. © Somaliland Law Images.

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Executive Summary

Historically and culturally, Somaliland is a distinct entity from the rest of Somalia, predating its swift and voluntary union with Italian Somalia. The first formal Treaties between the sovereign leaders of the Somaliland clans and Britain were signed in the nineteenth century. These leaders sought British political protection in exchange for Britain's export of livestock to Aden, Yemen, to support British troops based there. The British Somaliland Protectorate was formally established in July 1887 following these "protection treaties" with Somaliland clans. It achieved a brief independence for five days in 1960 after the British withdrawal, before uniting with the Italian colony of Somalia—a decision its people have consistently regretted. During this brief period, more than 34 countries, including Egypt, Israel, and all five permanent members of the UN Security Council, granted diplomatic recognition to Somaliland; notably, Israel was the first to do so.

Somaliland advances a multifaceted argument for its recognition as a sovereign state, asserting that its unique historical and legal circumstances render it an exception to the prevailing African doctrine of *uti possidetis*, which upholds the inviolability of colonial-era borders. Central to its claim is the contention that recognition would set no destabilizing precedent for the continent because Somaliland is not seceding from Somalia but rather dissolving a failed political merger. Its case rests on three interconnected pillars: historical sovereignty, territorial integrity based on colonial borders, and a profound moral justification. Historically, Somaliland existed as an independent state for five days in June 1960 before voluntarily uniting with the Italian-administered Somalia (Mogadishu) to form the Somali Republic. This Act of Union was a revocable compact that ultimately collapsed with the disintegration of the Somali state in 1991.

Furthermore, Somaliland demonstrated practical functioning statehood that deserves formal legal acknowledgement. For over three decades, in stark contrast to Somalia's protracted instability, Somaliland has maintained a remarkable degree of internal peace and security through indigenous, clan-based reconciliation and the establishment of stable governance institutions. This internal cohesion has enabled it to function as a responsible actor on the regional stage, cooperating directly with international partners on critical issues such as countering terrorism, combating piracy, and managing migratory flows. These bilateral engagements, often conducted with nations like Ethiopia, the UAE, the UK, the US, Taiwan, Kenya, and Djibouti, underscore its *de facto* capacity to fulfil international obligations.

Moreover, while challenges persist, Somaliland has made tangible progress in building a constitutional democracy—holding successive, competitive elections and witnessing notable peaceful transfers of power from a ruling party to the opposition. This is quite rare in Africa, where post-election riots and violence are common. In addition, it maintained a degree of press freedom and civil society engagement that is notable within its regional context, as acknowledged by Freedom House. The central moral and pragmatic claim is that this record of effective governance, civic participation, and regional cooperation represents a positive difference that the international community should acknowledge and solidify with recognition. Granting recognition is not merely

an act of historical justice but a strategic reward for proven stability, which would further embed these responsible practices and enhance the region's overall security architecture.

This paper examines Somaliland's decades-long quest for international recognition and the recent significant advance from the State of Israel. It analyzes Somaliland's legitimate claims—grounded in historical statehood, defined colonial borders, and a sustained record of democratic governance and internal stability. The paper directly counters the position held by Turkey, Djibouti, Egypt, and other dominant Muslim countries, contending that formal recognition would not destabilize the Horn of Africa but would instead reward and anchor a proven zone of peace. Finally, it outlines critical steps Somaliland must take to consolidate this opportunity, including bolstering diplomatic outreach, reinforcing internal unity, and unequivocally demonstrating its commitment to being a responsible regional actor.

Therefore, urgent and pragmatic steps are critical to consolidate this historic opportunity. To this end, five key recommendations for Somaliland are outlined below to secure its path toward recognition:

- Pursue a tiered diplomatic strategy and launch a targeted diplomatic offensive, categorizing potential partner states into tiers based on openness and strategic interest. Initial focus should be on building a coalition of states willing to grant formal recognition, while simultaneously deepening *de facto* engagement with others through bilateral agreements on trade, security, and development to further normalize its international relations.
- Institutionalize democratic gains and social cohesion by strengthening its moral and pragmatic claim; therefore, it must deepen its democratic institutions. This includes ensuring timely, inclusive, and transparent elections, strengthening judicial independence, and proactively fostering inter-community dialogue to maintain the internal unity that is its foundational strength.
- Develop a “Stability Dividend” framework through which Somaliland should proactively articulate and demonstrate its value as a regional security and economic partner. This involves creating a clear portfolio that highlights the Berbera Corridor's role in combating piracy, countering terrorism, and addressing illegal migration, and that details its economic potential as an asset for regional integration and trade.
- Formalize a post-recognition integration plan to alleviate international concerns. Therefore, Somaliland should draft and publicize a detailed roadmap outlining its assumption of sovereign responsibilities. This plan should address integration into international treaties, contribution to regional security architectures, and a proposed framework for peaceful, mutually respectful relations with Somalia, and finally,
- Leverage partnerships for capacity building by capitalizing on engagements with partners like Israel, Taiwan, and others. Therefore, Somaliland should establish structured capacity-building programs in critical sectors. Prioritizing agriculture (water management and arid farming), digital infrastructure, and professional security-sector training will translate diplomatic openings into tangible developmental gains, thereby further solidifying its governance credentials.

Somaliland History and Statehood

Somaliland originated as a political entity with the establishment of the British Somaliland Protectorate in 1884. Except for a brief period of Italian occupation from 1940 to 1941, the territory remained under British control until 26 June 1960, when it attained independence as the State of Somaliland. This independence was formally registered with the United Nations and recognized by more than 34 countries and governments, including all five permanent members of the UN Security Council (Schoiswohl, 2004; ICG, 2006; Tannock, 2009). Several days later, on 1 July 1960, the former UN Trusteeship of Somalia (Italian Somalia) also gained independence and united with Somaliland to form the Somali Republic (Markakis, 1998; Meredith, 2006). Although unification had been discussed by leaders from both Somaliland and Italian Somalia, the merger was hastily arranged and poorly prepared; the two parliaments even ratified differing Acts of Union (Contini, 1969; Wolde-Mariam, 1977). In contrast to Somaliland, the public and their leaders in Somalia were not willing to join the union, whereas Somalilanders were entirely enthusiastic about it. Despite shared ethnicity, language, and religion, the union—burdened by divergent colonial legacies and procedural flaws—ultimately contributed to the collapse of the Somali state after three decades.

Consequently, early dissatisfaction with the arrangements negotiated by Somaliland's leaders led Somaliland voters to reject the unitary constitution in a June 1961 referendum. In December of that year, Somaliland officers launched an unsuccessful coup in Hargeisa aimed at reasserting Somaliland's independence. This sentiment was reflected in the referendum campaign, where the Somaliland National League (SNL)—the party that had led Somaliland to independence from British rule and into its hasty union with the Italian Somalia—determinedly campaigned for a 'No' vote. By contrast, the Mogadishu-led government disbursed funds to its supporters in an effort to secure a 'Yes' vote (Dualeh, 2002; Lewis, 2002; Bulhan, 2008). Ultimately, the Somaliland electorate heeded the SNL's call to vote against the unitary constitution.

Although the union remained intact, dissatisfaction in Somaliland persisted. In October 1962, Somaliland ministers resigned from the government, and several days later, Somaliland representatives walked out of the National Assembly, threatening a boycott. This political stalemate was interrupted when a military coup deposed the republic's civilian administration. The subsequent military government, under the leadership of General Mohamed Siad Barre, further centralized state authority (Krennerich, 1999; Dualeh, 2002; Pijovic, 2013). Preoccupied by Somali nationalism ideology and the ambition to annex parts of Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti into the Somali Republic, Barre's expansionist ideology and the Greater Somalia ambitions, however, were ultimately ended by Somalia's catastrophic defeat in the 1977-1978 Ogaden War against Ethiopia.

Following that defeat, Somalia's central authority under the late General Siad Barre began suppressing its own citizens. This and other actions prompted the emergence of armed opposition movements against the Mogadishu regime, notably the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) in the northeast (present-day Puntland) and the Somali National Movement (SNM) in Somaliland (Duyvesteyn, 2005; Meredith, 2006).

After Somaliland people faced intentional mass killing, summary execution, torture, and rape across Somaliland, in May 1988, the SNM launched a military offensive against government garrisons in Somaliland, triggering a refugee crisis that saw hundreds of thousands flee to neighboring countries, particularly Ethiopia. The Barre regime retaliated by indiscriminately shelling Somaliland cities, making no distinction between civilian and military targets. This brutal response resulted in thousands of deaths and generated widespread, credible reports of war crimes.¹

While the Barre government targeted various rebel groups between 1978 and 1991, no other Somali community endured such sustained and intense state-sponsored violence as the Somaliland people suffered. By early 1991, as SNM fighters overcame the last government resistance in Somaliland and other Somali rebel groups advanced on Mogadishu, the Somali state effectively collapsed, ceasing to function as a unified state with centralized political and security authority (ICG, 2006; Pijovic, 2013). Subsequently, on 18 May 1991, Somaliland declared its independence within the borders of the former British Somaliland protectorate. Despite this declaration, Somaliland remained unrecognized by any country or international organization until December 26, 2025, when the State of Israel officially declared its re-recognition of Somaliland and cracked the wall of isolation.

Several interconnected factors drove the dissolution of the failed union. First, Somaliland was the sole partner that voluntarily surrendered its hard-won independence to pursue the Greater Somalia vision, sacrificing immense resources, time, and energy. In contrast, Somalia was neither willing nor eager for unification.² Second, at the same time, Djibouti was the first Somali region to gain independence, after Hargeisa and Mogadishu, in 1977; it openly refused to join the struggle to unite other Somali territories. Ironically, Djibouti now urges Somaliland to reunite with Somalia, despite its having rejected and abandoned the Greater Somalia ambition. Third, Somaliland endured devastating losses in its restoration war against the Mogadishu-based regime. Its major cities were systematically destroyed and subjected to mass executions by the Somali military. This campaign can be described as categorically clan cleansing, foreshadowing later atrocities like those of Bashar al-Assad in Syria.³ Often referred to as the Hargeisa Holocaust, or Isaaq Genocide, over 200,000 civilians were massacred under the watch of Arab and Muslim Bodies such as the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference in 1988 and 1989.⁴ These reasons collectively compelled Somaliland to reclaim its sovereignty and return to the borders it held upon independence from Britain on 26 June 1960.

Drawing on the legal and historical evidence presented, this paper underscores the double standard of the international system and asks why the international community largely acts as though Somaliland does not exist, a stance that reveals critical flaws in the global politics of recognition and the international state system. It sheds light on why both regional and international bodies have failed to respond constructively to Somaliland's claim. The argument is made clear that these actors had, and still have, an opportunity to engage as a neutral third party—fostering dialogue and stability—without prejudging Somaliland's ultimate sovereign status. Yet, they have persistently declined to do so.

A Case for the Dissolution of a Failed Union, Not Secession

Recognition is a political process through which states accept certain facts and confer upon them a specific legal status, such as statehood, sovereignty over territory, or the validity of nationality grants. When a new entity meets the established criteria for statehood, the decision to recognize it is a sovereign political choice made by each country individually. Full sovereign and diplomatic immunities are typically extended only after a state's executive authority has formally granted recognition (Shaw, 2004; Cassese, 2005). As defined by the Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners (2007), recognition is an official agreement that a country or organization exists. Similarly, the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2000) describes it as the act of accepting that something is official or true. In international law, recognition serves to validate factual situations and confer legal significance on them, though the relationship between fact and law is complex. Fundamentally, recognition is a unilateral political act with domestic and international legal consequences, whereby one state acknowledges the status or acts of another state or government (Mullerson, 2004). It may be accorded either *de facto* or *de jure*, and most commonly takes the form of an official declaration that a state has decided to acknowledge a new entity as an independent state.

New states emerge through various historical and legal processes, including partition, unification, secession, and dissolution. Examples include the unification of England and Scotland into Great Britain, the secession of Bangladesh from Pakistan, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union into independent republics (Mullerson, 2004; Maciver, 2006). A critical distinction in international law exists between secession—a unilateral break from a parent state, as seen with Kosovo—and dissolution, in which a central authority collapses and its components become sovereign, as occurred with the Mali Federation. In that case, Senegal and Sudan—French Sudan— (later Mali) entered a short-lived federation before peacefully separating into two recognized states, a process facilitated by mutual agreement (Crawford, 2006). Similarly, the Baltic States regained their independence in 1991 after decades of Soviet annexation, a restoration treated not as unilateral secession but as a negotiated resolution of unlawfully suppressed statehood.

The case of Somaliland presents a unique argument rooted in the dissolution of a failed union, as acknowledged by the African Union's 2005 fact-finding mission. This report asserts that it is not seceding from Somalia but reviving the sovereign state of the former British Somaliland Protectorate, which voluntarily united with Italian Somalia in 1960. Following the catastrophic collapse of the Somali Republic in 1991, Somaliland declared independence based on its pre-union borders. Its authorities have established *de facto* autonomy and stable governance, akin to historical cases of post-dissolution independence. Despite this claim of restored statehood and sovereignty and the clearly demarcated borders, no country or international organization has extended formal recognition. This underscores that recognition remains a political choice, heavily influenced by recognizing states' interests, rather than an automatic legal consequence. Thus, while Somaliland's situation draws parallels with cases such as Senegal and Mali, Egypt and Syria, the international community's reluctance underscores the enduring dilemma between *de facto* statehood and diplomatic recognition.

Therefore, Somaliland's enduring quest for international recognition presents a compelling legal and historical case, rooted in its defined borders, democratic governance, and stable institutions. Its three-decade absence from the international community, therefore, cannot be primarily attributed to a deficiency in legal merit. Instead, the persistent status quo is largely a product of calculated political calculus. Major foreign powers, prioritizing their regional interests, alliance dynamics, and existing diplomatic frameworks, often perceive their national interests as best served by maintaining the current order and encircling Somaliland. Consequently, recognition is treated not as a juridical verdict on statehood but as a geopolitical concession. This political immobilization overrides Somaliland's substantive achievements, leaving its legal arguments overshadowed by broader strategic considerations that favor foreign powers' interests over the inalienable rights of Somaliland citizens.

Egypt-Turkey Opposition

The Arab League, hosted and led by Egypt, has consistently opposed Somaliland's case since 1991. It remained silent, but also supportive during the crimes against humanity committed against Somaliland's people by Somalia's former military regime in the 1980s.⁵ This stance is driven not by principles of solidarity but by Egypt's strategic interests. Egypt uses the Somali political landscape as a proxy to counter Ethiopia, aiming to protect its national interests regarding Nile waters. From Cairo's perspective, the dissolution of the Somali Republic represents a direct threat to its national security, as a fragmented Somalia weakens a potential regional counterbalance to Ethiopia.

Consequently, Egypt's ultimate goal is to undermine Somaliland's regional position, often collaborating with Djibouti and the UN-backed government in Mogadishu. Its rejection of Somaliland's recognition by Israel is therefore not rooted in Islamic or Arab solidarity, but in cold strategic calculus. This is evidenced by Egypt's own actions, such as the restrictive closure of the Rafah crossing, which hindered aid to Gaza, demonstrating that its foreign policy is primarily dictated by national security, not religious affiliation.⁶ Egypt's attempts to frame its opposition to Somaliland in religious terms and solidarity with Palestine are a strategic deception, masking the core geopolitical motives behind its policy.

On the other hand, Turkey has strategically positioned itself as a focal point in Somalia's national strategy dossier, having profited from the humanitarian response to the devastating 2011 famine. It has since secured extensive economic and military interests, ranging from port and airport operations and military bases to offshore resource exploration. This stands in stark contrast to its historical ties with Somaliland, where legacies of the Ottoman Empire remain visible. Turkey's deliberate pivot to Somalia, while neglecting Somaliland, has fundamentally shifted local perceptions. Somalilanders long viewed Turkey not as a neutral mediator and actor in the dialogue with Somalia, but as a direct partisan opposing their cause.⁷ This is underscored by Turkey's injection of hundreds of millions in development aid and infrastructure projects exclusively in Somalia, without implementing any comparable projects in Somaliland.

Consequently, Turkey is a major opponent of Somaliland's sovereignty. Its public rejection of Somaliland's recognition by Israel is seen as particularly dishonest. This

stance cannot be credibly linked to religious solidarity or the Palestinian cause, given that Turkey maintains robust diplomatic and multi-billion-dollar trade relations with Israel, even amidst the conflict in Gaza. Instead, Somaliland interprets this rejection as part of a broader geopolitical alignment with Egypt, Somalia, and Djibouti aimed at containing its aspirations. Ultimately, this approach has backfired; the underestimation of Somaliland's cause by Turkey and Egypt is a primary catalyst for Israel's diplomatic outreach, making the re-recognition of Somaliland an increasingly irreversible geopolitical reality, and potentially ending Turkey's aspirations to become a Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea waters political and security actor.

The framework of the prisoner's dilemma theory, particularly as modeled in game theory, is highly relevant to this analysis. It posits states as unitary actors that make strategic calculations to maximize their own national interest and security, often prioritizing these over potential collective gains. This creates a dynamic akin to the prisoner's dilemma, where individual rationality leads to collectively suboptimal outcomes (Rochester, 2010). The described political practices illustrate this paradox. Both countries engage closely with Israel to secure distinct bilateral advantages, yet simultaneously denounce others for doing the same. This allows each to gain the benefit of cooperation while seeking diplomatic or moral advantage by criticizing their counterparts. Consequently, this cycle of unilateral action and mutual blame entrenches a non-cooperative equilibrium, undermining the possibility of a unified regional strategy that might yield greater shared benefits. Therefore, Somaliland cannot be dictated to sacrifice its own national interests by adhering to a collective Muslim stance on Palestine. In contrast, individual Muslim nations themselves prioritize bilateral relations over that very cause. It is inconsistent to demand that Somaliland be bound by a solidarity that other states freely circumvent for their own strategic benefit.

In reality, Turkey is a potential opponent of Somaliland's quest for international recognition. For example, Turkey strongly opposed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Ethiopia and the Republic of Somaliland in January 2024. While the full details remain confidential, the broad agreement involves Somaliland leasing a 20-kilometer stretch of coastline to Ethiopia for 50 years to build a naval base. In a historic and provocative exchange, the MoU reportedly stipulates that in return, Ethiopia would become the first sovereign nation to grant formal diplomatic recognition to Somaliland. Therefore, Turkey's role in undermining the MoU is particularly important to note. This is exemplified by its coordination of meetings in Ankara between Ethiopia's and Somalia's leaders (Eliab, 2025). This reveals a clear foreign policy outline that appears to work against Somaliland's interests. The central objective of these talks was to persuade Ethiopia to abandon its agreement for maritime access with Somaliland and instead negotiate solely with the internationally sponsored government based in Mogadishu.

In a nutshell, while diplomatic relations are founded on the principle of reciprocity, a cornerstone of international law ensuring that states grant equal, mutual, and equivalent treatment to each other's representatives, citizens, and interests (Freeman, 2010), Turkey's presence in Somaliland should end. Its Consulate General, which operates under the auspices of its Embassy in Mogadishu, should be closed. While Turkey's move justifies a countermove by Somaliland, the Somali adage "A bite may be

answered with a bite” aptly characterizes Turkey’s practices in the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea basin, and the Gulf of Aden.

A Persevering Society and Its Role in Regional Security

Despite that, Somaliland people have regretted their unification with the Italian colony in 1960; the citizens of Somaliland who endured state-sponsored terror in the 1980s and were driven out of their homes and flooded as refugees into Ethiopia, understand the pain of displacement deeply. It is a propaganda to suggest that Somaliland, guided by its moral and religious values, would ever support uprooting Palestinians from their homes. However, if the Somali government’s solidarity with Palestinians is based on religious faith and Muslim identity and solidarity, then why do they disregard the cause of over 1.5 million Rohingya Muslims, who long suffered and been uprooted and denied citizenship by Myanmar? Is there a difference in Muslims? Notably, Somalia established diplomatic relations with Myanmar in January 2026, just days after Israel recognized Somaliland. In what is happening in the Rakhine State of Myanmar, a Rohingya-populated region, a top United Nations human rights official described it as a “textbook example of ethnic cleansing” (Ali & Ibrahim, 2020). This selective stance reveals the hypocrisy and double standards of the UN-backed authorities in Mogadishu, and also those of other Muslim countries.

From a regional perspective, Somaliland is a significant contributor to regional security and stability. Its coastal waters are free from piracy, and its territory is not a haven for terrorist groups. Furthermore, Somaliland shares a peaceful, demilitarized border with Ethiopia spanning more than 800 kilometers, a stark contrast to the heavily militarized frontier of the past, which was fueled by Somalia’s irredentist policies. Somaliland has formally renounced such territorial claims and officially recognizes its border with Ethiopia, effectively concluding decades of hostility. This normalization directly challenges external actors, such as Egypt, which have a strategic interest in maintaining regional instability as a status quo to preserve their own influence and security calculus.

While Somaliland has established itself as a contributor to regional security and stability, it has effectively governed its territory. In contrast, Somalia continues to grapple with internal fragmentation and conflict, the effects of which radiate outward, undermining peace in neighboring areas. This dynamic positions Somalia not as a stabilizing force, but as a source of regional instability. There is a growing concern that resources provided by the international community to support state-building in Mogadishu are, either through diversion or direct use, being leveraged to unsettle otherwise peaceful areas in the Horn of Africa, including Somaliland. This misuse of aid risks perpetuating a cycle of instability that extends far beyond Somalia’s own borders.

The profound divergence in lived experience between Somaliland and Somalia is most acutely understood through the perspective of a younger generation, now in their 30s and 40s, for whom this contrast defines their nationalism, identity, and worldview. In Somaliland, this age interval has grown in relative peace, participated in competitive, democratic, and open elections, and aspires to build a future within a structured, self-determined polity. Across the border, their peers in Somalia have matured amidst chronic insecurity, political fragmentation, and the shadows of terrorism and famine.

This generational lens complicates dialogue and negotiations between Somaliland and Somalia, as neither age group knows much about the unity and history, and has grown up in distinct entities. For example, those in Somaliland advocate for the recognition and development of the country. Opposition, often rooted in a rigid adherence to the sanctity of failed unity and history, and in narrow geopolitical calculations, wilfully ignores the empirical reality on the ground. Therefore, the concluding argument must pivot decisively toward this reality and its long-term implications. Ultimately, for Somaliland, recognition is framed not as a concession, but as a strategic necessity—an affirmation of a peace-loving nation that has earned its sovereignty through practice and now stands as a crucial partner for regional security and prosperity.

The Two Faces of African Union Diplomacy

The African Union (AU), as a continental body, has often failed to address complex challenges decisively, and the case of Somaliland—the immediate neighbour of the African Union Headquarters—exemplifies this institutional paralysis. Somaliland's situation is historically and legally unique. It seeks not to alter colonial borders but to revert to the precise boundaries of the former British Somaliland Protectorate, from which it gained independence in 1960 before voluntarily uniting with Somalia. This position aligns with the foundational principle of *uti possidetis*, formally adopted by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) at its 1964 Cairo summit, which declared inherited colonial borders inviolable (Carroll & Rajagopal, 1993). Notably, Somalia rejected this resolution in 1964, having historically pursued claims to territories in Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya. Therefore, Somalia's contemporary appeal to a principle it originally opposed is fundamentally inconsistent and shows dishonesty.

Furthermore, an AU fact-finding mission in 2005 concluded that Somaliland's case was “unique” and warranted “special consideration,” effectively recommending engagement from the international community.⁸ The AU's subsequent failure to act on its own mission's findings—and its tendency to issue statements contrary to this analysis—reveals an organization operating on the political interests of influential member states rather than on its own established principles and evidence. By shelving its own reasoned assessment, the AU undermines its legitimacy and avoids a principled resolution of a case that directly tests its commitment to border integrity, stability, and post-conflict reconciliation.

Ending Over Three Decades of Isolation

Since achieving *de facto* independence in 1991, Somaliland has operated without formal international recognition, which has led to profound challenges. The denial of *de jure* status by neighboring states and major powers—including key Arab and Muslim nations such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey—has rendered it politically isolated, economically fragile, and vulnerable to security threats (Ylönen & Ali, 2025). Despite this sustained isolation and the absence of international support, Somaliland has undertaken a remarkable state-building project (Phillips, 2020). It has independently established relative stability, functional governance, and democratic institutions, demonstrating significant resilience and administrative capacity under conditions of persistent non-recognition.

On 31 May 2001, a public referendum approved Somaliland's constitution with 97.7 percent support, establishing a framework for multi-party democracy. Since that foundational vote, Somaliland has conducted a series of credible presidential, parliamentary, and local elections, building one of the most functional constitutional democracies in both the region and the Muslim world (Kaplan, 2008; De Waal, 2015; Prunier, 2021). Despite this sustained record of internal governance and political stability, it remains entirely unrecognized. Conversely, Somalia, which has lacked an effective central authority since 1991, continues to receive *de jure* recognition as a state. This stark contradiction between empirical statehood and diplomatic legitimacy reveals a profound hypocrisy at the core of the international state system.

The proposition that re-recognizing the Republic of Somaliland violates international law is fundamentally flawed, as recognition is inherently a political, not a legal obligation. Recognition is a unilateral political act through which one state acknowledges and accepts the legal status of another entity as a sovereign state. It is a discretionary process of endowing a territory that meets the factual criteria of statehood with legal international status (Shaw, 2004). Consequently, each sovereign state decides independently whether to extend such acknowledgment. Therefore, the extension of diplomatic recognition to Somaliland, an entity that asserts it fulfills these conditions, falls within the political prerogative of any state, including Israel, and does not constitute a breach of international law.

Somaliland has functioned as a *de facto* state for over three decades, maintaining a permanent population, defined borders, and stable governing institutions without international support. According to the widely accepted legal criteria for statehood outlined in Article 1 of the 1933 Montevideo Convention, a state must possess: (a) a permanent population; (b) a defined territory; (c) a government; and (d) the capacity to enter into relations with other states (Crawford, 2006). Somaliland demonstrably meets these objective conditions, yet its claim to sovereignty remains unrecognized. This enduring rejection, despite its clear fulfillment of conventional benchmarks, underscores a significant gap between the legal principles of statehood and the political realities of international recognition.

Therefore, the case for Israel's re-recognition of Somaliland rests on a firm legal and historical foundation, reflects current realities, and thus presents a legitimate policy position. This decision is strategically timed amid the Horn of Africa's shifting political landscape, in which regional influence is fiercely contested. Turkey has assumed a dominant role in Somalia since 2011 and portrayed itself as a chief architect of Somalia's political and security landscape. Egypt views the region as vital to its Nile water security, and Djibouti perceives a recognized Somaliland as an economic threat due to potential port competition with Berbera. However, this dynamic need not be adversarial; constructive collaboration between these ports could instead foster mutual economic benefit for both nations and their communities. Ultimately, as Somaliland contributed to the regional security without recognition, a recognized Somaliland would further strengthen the region's political stability in the long term, in contrast to opponents' viewpoints.

To fortify the compelling historical and legal arguments for Somaliland's recognition, this analysis benefits from a rigorous, practical examination grounded in the starkly divergent realities of the last three decades. This contemporary contrast begins with Somalia's tragic trajectory: the collapse of central authority precipitated a vacuum filled by warlordism, black market economy, the proliferation of terrorist groups like *Al-Shabaab*, and a complete erosion of law and order. This state failure has not only generated massive human suffering. Still, it has also tragically damaged Somalia's image in the international community, casting it as a perennial subject of humanitarian intervention and security crises. In stark contrast, this is the Somaliland narrative—a story of resilience and indigenous innovation. Denied formal recognition, its people embarked on a remarkable project of state-building from the ashes of conflict. By utilizing traditional Somali customary systems, known as “*Xeer*,” and clan-based reconciliation, Somaliland forged a unique social contract, establishing stability where none had existed. This foundation enabled the cultivation of democratic institutions, evidenced by repeated peaceful transfers of power through direct elections. The result is the tangible “dividend of peace”: a *de facto* state that, while not without challenges, has secured its borders, fostered economic activity, and built functional governance—all without international support and assistance. These homegrown institutions and self-made achievements have rightfully earned Somaliland the respect and admiration of global observers who witness a functional polity thriving in a volatile region. Recognizing this success is not merely an unearned reward; it is an acknowledgment of a proven model of stability, a pragmatic reward for demonstrable good governance, and a reliable partner.

Charting the Path Forward

Israel's recognition of Somaliland as an independent state in the Horn of Africa represents a historic diplomatic move and an opportunity that Somalilanders have long awaited. This potential engagement offers not merely symbolic validation but a tangible pathway to the international legitimacy Somaliland desperately seeks. To seize this moment, Somaliland must undertake a concerted, strategic effort to ensure that this diplomatic opening yields sustainable, long-term benefits for its state institutions and its people.

Forging a substantive partnership with Israel would enable Somaliland to access expertise and technology in critical sectors in which Israel excels. First, leveraging Israel's advanced agricultural innovations could be transformative. Somaliland could implement knowledge-transfer programs in drip irrigation, arid-land farming, and water management, thereby directly addressing its environmental challenges and enhancing food security. Secondly, cooperation in science and technology is vital for foundational development. Investments in digital infrastructure, telecoms, and technical education, guided by Israeli experience, could accelerate Somaliland's integration into the global economy and foster a knowledge-based society.

Thirdly, and crucially, Somaliland's security would be a paramount area for cooperation. Operating in a region marked by instability, Somaliland must build resilient security institutions. Engagement with Israel and Taiwan could provide advanced training, strategic knowledge, and necessary equipment across domains ranging from defense

and intelligence to cybersecurity. This would strengthen Somaliland's capacity to safeguard its sovereignty and provide stability, making it a more credible and secure partner on the world stage.

Ultimately, the responsibility rests with Somaliland to operationalize its potential relationship with Israel and Taiwan. Recognition is not an endpoint but a beginning of a journey to development and social stability. Therefore, Somaliland must proactively design and propose concrete frameworks for cooperation in these key areas, demonstrating its seriousness as a sovereign actor. By doing so, it can translate diplomatic dialogue into tangible progress, ensuring that this long-awaited opportunity catalyzes meaningful development and reinforces its claim to statehood through effective governance and international partnership.

Conclusion

Somaliland's journey toward *de jure* statehood represents a profound anomaly in the modern international order: an entity that demonstrably meets the conventional criteria for statehood yet remains in diplomatic limbo for over three decades. Its case, grounded in a distinct colonial history, a voluntary but failed political union, and a sustained record of indigenous peacebuilding and democratic practice, challenges the rigid application of norms that often prioritize territorial integrity over empirical reality. The international community's reluctance to engage meaningfully with Somaliland's claim, despite evidence of its stability and the African Union's own acknowledgment of its "unique" circumstance, reveals a system where political expediency frequently overrides principle.

The opposition from Muslim countries such as Egypt, Turkey, and Djibouti is not grounded in a defense of international law but in narrow strategic interests, ranging from hydrological politics to economic dominance. This underscores that Somaliland's struggle is less about meeting legal benchmarks and more about navigating a complex geopolitical landscape. The re-recognition of Israel by Somaliland, therefore, is not merely a bilateral development but a significant crack in the wall of isolation, offering a model for other states to pursue engagement based on practical realities and mutual interest.

Ultimately, recognizing Somaliland is not an act of creating a new state but of acknowledging a longstanding political fact. It is a strategic opportunity to anchor a zone of proven stability in a volatile region, encourage democratic governance, and uphold the principles of border integrity and self-determination that underpin the African Union's founding charter. Continued denial only perpetuates injustice and instability. The path forward requires the international community to move beyond inertia and confront the contradiction it has tolerated for over thirty years, embracing a pragmatic and principled recognition of Somaliland's rightful place among nations.

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Notes

¹ The costs and the consequences of Barre's military intervention in Somaliland are visible. The mental health consequences of physical and psychological torture in the context of the Siad Barre regime's engagement in torture practices on the people of Somaliland includes the targeting of civilians in the 1980s where an estimated 200,000 people lost their lives, and over 1,000,000 were displaced. This could be one dimension of the extreme adverse impact of the state intervention. For further information please read the book: *A Government at War with Its Own People: Testimonies about the Killings and the Conflict in the North by Africa Watch*, 1990.

² Without exaggeration, the people of Somaliland were the foremost champions in the struggle for the liberation of all Somali people in the Horn of Africa, both during and after colonial rule. The resonant songs and poems that advocated for independence were largely composed and performed by artists and intellectuals from Somaliland. This commitment extended beyond the arts: two prominent Somaliland lawyers, Michael Mariano and Sultan Biho Momin, famously journeyed from Hargeisa to New York to successfully plead the case for Somalis independence.

³ During the May 1988 conflict, Somalia's military regime systematically targeted the people of Somaliland. The Somali Air Force, utilizing foreign mercenaries, extensively bombarded cities like Hargeisa and Burao. This campaign, involving indiscriminate airstrikes, extrajudicial killings, and mass detention, constituted grave crimes against humanity aimed squarely at civilians. The New York Times reported over 10,000 killed in the first month alone. A fighter jet now stands in central Hargeisa as a permanent memorial to these atrocities and the resilience of the Somaliland people.

⁴ The documentary "Kill All But the Crows," released by Al Jazeera, details crimes against humanity committed by the Somali government in 1988–89. It exposes a state-sponsored campaign aimed at the Somaliland community, which resulted in an estimated 50,000 to over 200,000 civilian deaths. For further details, please watch the documentary via this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNBtIc2wHU8>.

⁵ In the years 1988 and 1989 alone, over 100,000 mines were buried in Hargeisa and the surrounding areas. These munitions were primarily supplied by Egypt, including a widely used type of Egyptian-manufactured anti-personnel hand grenade. The explosives killed, injured, and maimed thousands of Somaliland citizens. To this day, many areas remain contaminated and await clearance. For further details, please visit this link: <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/somalia-dealing-deadly-legacy>.

⁶ The Somaliland community, with the support of their government, has publicly raised millions to support Gaza, while neighboring Egypt keeps the Rafah crossing closed. Egypt's rejection of Somaliland's recognition by Israel is a cynical gesture. The cause of Somaliland is distinct and must not be conflated with the Palestinian issue or religious politics.

⁷ Turkey has consistently opposed Somaliland's independence. While hosting multiple negotiation rounds between Somaliland and Somalia, Turkey did not pressure Somalia to implement the agreed terms. This reflects how Turkey and Somalia operate as one entity, rendering the talks dishonest. Ultimately, the process served only to divert Somaliland's attention and energy from its own priorities.

⁸ The 2005 AU Fact-Finding Mission found Somaliland functioning as a stable, democratic state with defined borders, institutions, and public consensus for independence, stemming from the failed 1960 union with Somalia. The report notes Somaliland's legitimate historical case and recommends that the AU address its status uniquely, not as a precedent, due to its distinct history. It urges recognition to aid development and advises dialogue with Mogadishu to prevent conflict.

About the Paper

This paper examines the protracted quest of Somaliland for international recognition, analyzing its unique historical and legal claim as a case of dissolution rather than secession. It argues that, having existed as a sovereign state in 1960 before voluntarily entering a failed union with Somalia, Somaliland seeks to reassert its independence within its former colonial borders—a position aligned with the African principle of *uti possidetis*. The paper details Somaliland's three-decade record of *de facto* statehood, characterized by relative internal stability, democratic development, and constructive regional engagement, and contrasts it with Somalia's chronic instability. It further explores the geopolitical impediments to recognition, highlighting the strategic opposition from regional actors like Egypt and Turkey, and critiques the inconsistent application of international norms by bodies such as the African Union. The recent diplomatic engagement with Israel is presented as a potential turning point. The paper concludes that recognition is a political choice, and granting it to Somaliland would reward proven governance, enhance regional security, and correct a longstanding anomaly in the international system.

About the Institute

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